

Message

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To: Carla Morgan [cmorgan@eastchicago.com]
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East Chicago press clips**US EPA Region 5 – prepared by the Office of Public Affairs****September 12, 2016****Lakeshore Public Media – East Chicago Still Struggling Over Lead Contamination Crisis****WI Times - Answering questions concerning the East Chicago lead crisis**

<http://lakeshorepublicmedia.org/east-chicago-still-struggling-over-lead-contamination-crisis/>

East Chicago Still Struggling Over Lead Contamination Crisis

By: Nick Janzen, Indiana Public Broadcasting Reporter
 September 9, 2016

EAST CHICAGO - East Chicago is grappling with a lead contamination crisis in the city's Calumet neighborhood. Some local residents were disappointed the issue was not addressed at a meeting of the city's governing body Thursday.

The US Environmental Protection Agency briefed East Chicago's Common Council on the lead contamination in a private meeting two weeks ago. Some residents hoped to hear those details this week, in the counsel's regularly scheduled public meeting, including Darie Gibbs –

"That's exactly why I came here, because I thought that was going to be one of the subjects brought up. And it was nothing said."

The EPA measured lead levels in the soil in the residential Calumet neighborhood over 100 times higher than levels allowed by the feds. Lead contamination is a health threat to all residents, especially children, because it's detrimental to brain development.

Gibbs moved to the neighborhood in the 19-70's, she lives a few blocks from an area where the highest lead levels have been measured and residents have been directed to move. Gibbs has not been told to move, and she doesn't want to if she doesn't have to.

"It's hard letting go of a place you've lived for so long. But my thing is I just want answers. Nobody is coming to me where I can ask questions. That's all I want. You know? That's all I ask for.

The former U.S.S. Lead plant polluted the neighborhood's soil. It closed in 1985. The EPA has known about the contamination since that time and listed the neighborhood for national clean up assistance in 2009.

http://www.nwitimes.com/news/special-section/ec-lead/answering-questions-concerning-the-east-chicago-lead-crisis/article_c4c3430b-c845-5014-85ae-d309c8da6c28.html

Answering questions concerning the East Chicago lead crisis

- Lauren Cross and Sarah Reese, The Times
- Sep 10, 2016

When did the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency first become involved with the USS Lead Superfund site?

The EPA first became involved in the 1980s, and a 1998 report by the federal Agency for Toxic Substances and Disease Registry shows the EPA knew at least as early as 1997 of a long-ago-demolished lead factory at the West Calumet Housing Complex site. Residents in the Calumet neighborhood potentially have been living on land that was contaminated with lead and arsenic before their homes were constructed, records show.

What is a Superfund site?

A Superfund site is land that has been contaminated by hazardous waste and targeted by the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency for potential cleanup. As of Sept. 9, 2016, there were nearly 1,340 sites scattered throughout the United States listed on the federal agency's National Priorities List.

The USS Lead Superfund site was first proposed for the National Priorities List in February 1992, when USS Lead's parent company, Sharon Steel, filed for bankruptcy, according to a January 2011 report from the Agency for Toxic Substances and Disease Registry. At that time, the site was never actually listed. The EPA again proposed listing the site in September 2008, and it joined the list in April 2009. The West Calumet Housing Complex and Carrie Gosch Elementary School sit on about 50 acres of the roughly 400-acre USS Lead Superfund site.

You can search for other Superfund sites in the U.S. here:

<https://www.epa.gov/superfund/national-priorities-list-npl-sites-state>

What is the history of the site? Was there a cleanup of the site prior to the homes being built?

The U.S. Environmental Protection Agency Superfund site is named after USS Lead, a shuttered factory at the southwest side of the area. Another lead factory, known alternately as International Lead Refining Co., Anaconda Lead Products and Eagle Picher, was constructed in 1912. That factory was torn down sometime after 1959, and the West Calumet Housing Complex was constructed there between 1970 and 1973. It's likely the Anaconda factory buildings were bulldozed and no remediation was done before construction of the complex, according to the city.

What levels of lead concentrations has the EPA found in the soil in West Calumet? What do the results mean?

The EPA released soil test data to the city in May 2016. The maximum lead level found was 91,100 parts per million at a depth of 18 to 24 inches on Aster Avenue, at the southwest side of the housing complex. Previous testing at nine properties at the complex in 2009 found lead levels as high as 9,406 or 27,100 ppm, depending on which EPA document is referenced.

EPA's residential cleanup standard is 400 ppm. Levels above the 1,200 ppm threshold require emergency cleanup, according to the EPA.

According to the CDC, children and adults who are exposed to high levels of arsenic may experience irritation of the stomach and intestines, blood vessel damage, skin changes and reduced nerve function. There is some evidence that exposure to arsenic in early life may increase mortality in young adults, according to the federal agency. Even at low exposure levels, lead can have a lasting impact on children's academic achievements, levels of intelligence and ability to pay attention. Infants and children up to age 6 are particularly at risk when exposed to lead.

Are other neighborhoods near the West Calumet Housing Complex being tested? Is there reason to believe this is bigger than just West Calumet?

The entire Calumet neighborhood in East Chicago is part of the EPA's Superfund site. Residents in the rest of the neighborhood, which has been divided into three cleanup zones, are either awaiting soil testing results or preparing for the EPA to clean up their properties. EPA has rapidly expanded soil sampling activities in the middle part of the neighborhood, which is covered by a cleanup plan it selected in 2012 but not by a \$26 million settlement with two companies deemed responsible for contamination in other parts of the neighborhood. Who will pay for cleanup in the middle part of the neighborhood has not yet been determined.

Zone 1 — which covers the complex and school — is covered under the consent decree. The other zone covered under the agreement is zone 3, which is located between the Elgin and Joliet Railway Line and Parrish Avenue. Zone 2, which is not covered under the decree, is bounded by East Chicago Avenue to the north, 151st Street to the south, McCook Avenue to the west, and Elgin-Joliet and Eastern Parkway to the east. It also includes a segment just north of Carrie Gosch Elementary School and west of McCook.

The EPA has said it plans to begin removing soil at the most highly contaminated properties in the eastern part of the neighborhood in September 2016. Residents there have started receiving their soil test results.

Why are families in the West Calumet Housing Complex being told they need to relocate?

Testing of soil in the area began decades ago, but when the EPA finally conducted extensive soil sampling for lead and arsenic contaminants in 2014 and 2015, the results were far worse than expected. After learning of the alarming lead and arsenic levels in May 2016, Mayor Anthony Copeland sent several letters to the EPA asking that residents in the complex be relocated and asking the agency to suspend any plans for excavation until residents are relocated.

How many people/families have been affected by this?

More than 1,000 residents, including about 680 children, live within the West Calumet Housing Complex. Residents have until Nov. 30 to move, according to a state agency that is also assisting, but can request extensions under certain circumstances.

What is being done for the families living in West Calumet?

The U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development and the East Chicago Housing Authority are working to provide vouchers to families for permanent relocation to safe housing. The U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development last month released \$1.9 million to the East Chicago

Housing Authority to provide vouchers so West Calumet Complex residents can permanently relocate.

The state has provided \$200,000 in aid for relocation efforts and blood lead testing and lead poisoning prevention and education efforts. In September, the East Chicago Housing Board of Commissioners approved the use of capital funds to aid residents with moving expenses. Board members also voted to waive criminal background check requirements as part of the voucher process.

What will happen to the site now that it's been determined it is highly contaminated with lead and arsenic? What about zones 2 and 3 of the Superfund site?

The EPA in 2012 selected a cleanup plan and reached an agreement in fall 2014 with Atlantic Richfield and DuPont for a \$26 million cleanup in part of the USS Lead Superfund site. However, in August, the federal agency said cleanup of the property could be renegotiated depending on the city's long-term plans for the area. The EPA is re-examining the 2012 remediation plan for portions of zone 1 in light of new developments, according to officials. The EPA is waiting on the city, the East Chicago Housing Authority and HUD for input on future land use.

City officials have said they decided demolition of the West Calumet complex was the safest option after learning in May of the levels found during extensive soil sampling by the EPA. Infrastructure in the area requires frequent repair, which is complicated by the hazardous soils, city records show. The city also has concerns that the EPA's initial cleanup plan for the area would remove only a fraction of the contamination, leaving tainted dirt in place under paved streets, sidewalks, parking lots and buildings.

The 2014 consent decree does not address zone 2, and it has not yet been determined who ultimately will pay for the remedial work in that zone. The EPA will address remaining properties in zone 3 needing cleanup this fall or in the spring, according to the agency. A public meeting will take place in September for zone 3 residents to discuss the cleanup process and answer questions.

Sincerely,

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